

## March 2019 –The trail of the Loire Valley Ladies

**More female figures held power in France during the Renaissance than at any other time in its history. To mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Catherine de Medici (owner of two iconic chateaux, Chaumont and Chenonceau), we shine the spotlight on these Ladies of the Loire Valley and a few of their modern-day counterparts – and offer yet more reasons to visit this iconic part of France in 2019.**

### The Renaissance women: Catherine and Anne

Widely considered one of France's greatest monarchs, **Catherine de Medici** was queen of France from 1547 to 1559 and ruled as Queen Mother and Regent for four further years. She became an icon of the Loire Valley as owner of the Chateau de Chaumont-sur-Loire – and later, on the death of her husband Henri II, owner of the Chateau de Chenonceau following an exchange with Diane de Poitiers, the king's mistress. She is also considered one of 16<sup>th</sup>-century France's greatest artistic patrons, instigating vast additions to Chenonceau including its two elegant, signature galleries over the river and a series of gardens. She died at the Chateau de Blois in 1589.

Another of the Loire Valley's major female figures is **Anne Boleyn**, second wife of King Henry VIII of England and his Queen Consort from 1533 to 1536. In France, she was appointed Queen Claude's Maid of Honour and spent almost seven years in her service, a large amount of which was spent at Blois and Amboise during the queen's pregnancies. During this period, Anne learned French and acquired a knowledge of French culture and etiquette – and she played a major role in England's international position by consolidating agreements with France.

### The modern women: Places to eat, sleep and admire

Sharing the same name as the famous French monarch, **Catherine Delacoute** embarked on a major career change from accountant to restaurateur in the Loire. She worked in several Michelin-starred restaurants before restoring an old farmhouse with her father near Orléans, which became her **restaurant 'Le Lancelot'**. For the past 20 years she has served traditional French cuisine inspired by her mother's dishes, with one menu entitled 'L'Ardoise de Catherine' – it's a perfect pitstop on your journey through the Loire Valley.

Hailing from Paris, **Valérie Esnault** fell in love with the lush landscapes of the Loire Valley two decades ago and, with her artistic eye and green fingers not unlike those of Catherine de Medici, became the devoted owner of **manor and arboretum Domaine de Poulaines**. She has worked tirelessly here to create a series of themed

gardens across 4.5 hectares. Visitors can stay overnight in the garden cottage (sleeps 2-4), which gives access to tennis courts and treehouses for children. Surrounded by 20 hectares of woodland, the garden received the prestigious 'Jardin Remarquable' ('Remarkable Garden') label in 2014.

**Elisabeth Latrémolière** is curator of the **fine arts museum at the Chateau de Blois**, where Anne Boleyn spent much of her time as royal maid. Classified as a historic monument since 1845, the chateau is unique in the Loire Valley with its showcase of different architectural styles spanning five centuries. Today Blois is an art lover's paradise, with some 35,000 pieces housed here including paintings by Ingres, Rubens and Boucher. The series of rooms forms a theme-based circuit, offering a new way of appreciating art history by grouping works devoted to a given subject, supported by explanatory panels accessible to all ages.

### The Loire Valley: Events celebrating women

Follow in Catherine de Medici's footsteps at **Chateau de Chaumont-sur-Loire**, where an exhibition entitled 'The Queen's Tapestries' (September–December 2019) will present life through her eyes. Another exhibition, the 'Renaissance of Catherine' (May–October 2019) brings the queen and modern women together at the **Chateau de Chenonceau**, celebrating Catherine by revamping the garden she added to the chateau and allowing visitors to explore her apothecary room.

The Loire Valley of Anne Boleyn's lifetime is represented by an exhibition at the **Chateau de Blois**. 'Children of the Renaissance' (18 May–1 September 2019) will reveal how the royal children of Catherine, Anne of Brittany and Queen Claude were raised in the Renaissance court, and address the issues surrounding pregnancy and childbirth at the time.

As well as being 500 years since Catherine de Medici was born, 2019 also marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci in Amboise and the start of construction of the Royal Chateau of Chambord. This historic trilogy is set to be celebrated across the whole region of Centre-Val de Loire with an eclectic programme of events throughout the year, giving visitors even more reason to enjoy this iconic part of France.

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**About Atout France**

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